

He Loved Me...

He Loves Me Lots

The Gospel of John

Text

John 19:31-42

Topic

Joseph & Nicodemus risk everything to give Jesus a hasty but kingly burial in Joseph's tomb

Title

"Best Tomb-mates Ever"

Not often, but more often than I would like, I have assisted law-enforcement in moving a dead body.

I identify with Joseph and Nicodemus. Theirs was the privilege of moving the body of Jesus from Cross to tomb, and of caring for His body with spiced wrappings.

They were Law-of-Moses-abiding Jews:

- Joseph was "a respected member of the Jewish council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God" (Mark 15:43).
- Nicodemus was a member of the council who openly opposed the treatment of Jesus as illegal according to the Law of Moses (John 7:50-51).

Their compassionate act prohibited them from celebrating Passover.

According to the Law of Moses,

Num 19:11 He who touches the dead body of anyone shall be unclean seven days.

Num 19:12 He shall purify himself with the water on the third day and on the seventh day; *then* he will be clean. But if he does not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not be clean.

The two Law-abiding members of the council could not participate in the Passover that their Law-breaking colleagues were anxious to celebrate.

But listen: They kept the last Passover.

The death of Jesus marked the last Passover. It was the *culmination* and *consummation* of Passover. The lambs slain in Egypt the night of the first Passover, and every lamb sacrificed through the centuries, were placeholders until Jesus came. He was the lamb of God Who once-for-all takes away the sin of the world.

The New Testament tells us, "For indeed Christ, **our Passover**, was sacrificed for us" (First Corinthians 5:7). The annual Passover was a shadow; Jesus is the substance.

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 Behold Your Lamb**, and **#2 Believe Your Lamb**.

#1 - Jesus Is Your Lamb (v31-37)

"What does God say to Christians about Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Pentecost, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Tabernacles? The answer is simple: 'Celebrate!' "

I lifted that quote from a Jewish website. Christians have been gravitating to Jewish feasts in growing numbers.

It isn't unusual for churches to sponsor Passover Seders.

Be my guest. It is entirely up to you. Remember two things:

1. When Jesus said, "It is finished," *that included ceremonial law*. It included Passover. Jesus is our Passover.
2. The liturgy for the modern Passover Sedar did not emerge until nearly two hundred years after the resurrection of Jesus. It is very different from the simple observance in Exodus. Most of the modern Passover *cannot be found in the Bible*.

We are the church & we don't do Judaism.

Joh 19:31 Therefore, because it was the Preparation *Day*, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and *that* they might be taken away.

Does anybody really know what day it is?

I kept asking that question as I read various commentaries. Scholars sharply disagree on the chronology of events during Passion Week. At issue is a possible conflict between John's account and that of the other three Gospels regarding the Passover meal Jesus ate with His disciples:

- Matthew, Mark, and Luke record Jesus eating the Passover with His disciples *before* He was crucified.
- John says that Jesus was crucified at the very moment the Passover lambs were sacrificed in the Temple. If that is true, then Jesus could not have eaten the Passover meal with His disciples.

My head hurt trying to figure it out. One solution rises above the others. It is corroborated by the fact the Dead Sea Scrolls reveal that there were *two separate calendars* which were used in the calculation of feast days. One was Galilean, while the other was Judean.

If I asked you the date of Christmas, you would most likely say December 25th. Many Orthodox Christians around the world celebrate Christmas Day on January 7th. Their churches use the Julian calendar.

There were two opportunities to officially eat the Passover meal.

The most important thing to keep in mind choosing a solution is that Jesus died at the same time the lambs were being sacrificed in the Temple.

We assume that the Preparation Day was to get ready for Passover. It wasn't. Preparation Day has to do with the weekly Sabbath. Every week the hours before the Sabbath were filled with preparations.

Calling it a "high day" may indicate that Passover fell on a Sabbath Day that year. This year Christmas Day is a High Christmas. (I'm making that up; there is no such thing as a High Christmas). This year December 25th is a Sunday, so we get to celebrate

together as a family. It's only the sixth time in 37 years that December 25th has fallen on a Sunday.

Breaking the legs with a mallet prevented the victim from being able to push himself up to catch a breath. He would thus shortly die from suffocation.

Joh 19:32 Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him.

Joh 19:33 But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs.

Roman soldiers who carried out the sentence of crucifixion served as on-scene coroners. They knew death, and could be trusted to know if a man was dead or mostly dead.

Jesus was dead. He was so obviously dead that they didn't break His legs, even though those were their instructions.

Joh 19:34 But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.

Executioners didn't normally plunge a spear into those crucified. It was another inadvertent fulfillment of prophecy, quoted in verse thirty-seven.

There are a slew of explanations for what exactly happened. We don't know the medical significance.

There is one theory put forth by opponents of Christianity that Jesus swooned, then revived in the Tomb. End of the day, John was trying to establish that Jesus was dead.

A.W. Pink writes,

"That blood should flow from one now dead, that blood and water should issue together, yet separated, was clearly a miracle. The water and the blood came forth to bear witness, that God has given to us eternal life, and that this life is in His Son."

Joh 19:35 And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe.

John could have inserted this declaration anywhere, so why here? It is super important that Jesus died. Going back to the Garden of Eden, God told our parents that if they disobeyed His one command, if they sinned, *they would die*. They sinned, bringing death upon themselves and their descendants.

Sin demands death. God promised that He would come as the Seed of the woman to be our substitute in paying the penalty of death.

It would take some time - about 4000 years. In the mean time, God would accept sacrificial animals as temporary substitutes.

Ultimately, it must be the blood of a man, and he must be a perfect, sinless man. Seeing as all men are born with a sin nature, the substitute must be born miraculously. The only possible resolve to this is that God be born to a virgin and become incarnate. Being without sin, He could take our place and thereby save us.

Salvation only comes through substitution.

Joh 19:36 For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, "NOT ONE OF HIS BONES SHALL BE BROKEN."

Joh 19:37 And again another Scripture says, "THEY SHALL LOOK ON HIM WHOM THEY PIERCED."

The verses referred to are Numbers 9:12 and Zechariah 12:10. I like to think of John as a guy who did weekly prophecy updates in church. He said, "Here are two Scriptures fulfilled by Jesus on the Cross." Fulfilled prophecy is a powerful testimony.

Even more powerful, Jesus fulfilled prophecy while dead!

- He was dead when they decided to not mallet His legs.
- He was dead when they pierced His side.
- He was dead when He was buried among the wealthy in an unused tomb.

I'd like to see Nostradamus try that. I get thoroughly annoyed by the attention so-called educational television pays to Nostradamus and his weird quatrains. He published over 1500 quatrains in 1555. Scholars have found 9 that *might* be considered prophetic, if you look back on history with creative license.

Did you know that Jesus fulfilled at least 27 Messianic prophecies in one day? Or that He fulfilled 300+ Messianic prophecies through His birth, life, and resurrection? Hugh Ross writes,

"Unique among all books ever written, the Bible accurately foretells specific events - in detail - many years, sometimes centuries, before they occur. Approximately 2,500 prophecies appear in the pages of the Bible, about 2,000 of which already have been fulfilled to the letter - no errors. The remaining 500 or so reach into the future and may be seen unfolding as days go by. Since the probability for any one of these prophecies having been fulfilled by chance averages less than one in ten (figured very conservatively) and since the prophecies are for the most part independent of one another, the odds for all these prophecies having been fulfilled by chance without error is less than one in 102000 (that is 1 with 2,000 zeros written after it)!"

I find it outrageous so many Christians have no interest in future prophecy, just at the time so many things are being set up for the Great Tribulation.

A.W. Tozer writes, *"Believing... is directing the hearts' attention to Jesus. It is lifting the mind to 'Behold the Lamb of God,' and never ceasing that beholding for the rest of our lives."*

We would do well to memorize and meditate on these words of Amy Carmichael:

*"From all that dims Thy Calvary,
O Lamb of God, deliver me."*

#2 - Be-Love Your Lamb (v38-42)

The funeral of Queen Elizabeth II is the most recent state sponsored celebration for a beloved monarch.

Her body was laid in state for four days in Westminster Abbey. Initial reports say that 250,000 people were able to pay their respects.

The funeral itself was attended by about 2,000 people, including heads of state and royalty from dozens of countries around the world. Four billion watched on television.

Jesus is King of kings, Lord of lords. "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in Heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and *that* every

tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10-11).

The attendance for the funeral of Jesus was two; and they were the morticians.

Joh 19:38 After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave *him* permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus.

A lot of commentary ink has been used dissing Joseph for believing “secretly, for fear of the Jews.” A couple of things come to mind:

1. I was privileged to smuggle Bibles into China. While there, we were able to meet a couple of underground believers. I would never even think to criticize them for staying under the communist radar.
2. We tend to forget that sanctification is a process. We *grow* in the Lord, we *mature*. Joseph was growing. There certainly was not anything secret about his actions at the Cross.

There is a catch-phrase that I really don't think is biblical. It is, “If Jesus is not Lord of all, He is not Lord *at* all.”

Has there ever been a believer who could honestly say, “Jesus is Lord of all?” Lord of every action and reaction? Lord of every word that comes out of their mouth? Lord of every single thought?

It certainly wasn't the apostle Paul. Towards the end of his life he claimed to be the chief of sinners.

No one can say “Jesus is Lord of all” with regard to their walk with Him. It leads to legalism, in which I think I am more submitted, and ultimately more spiritual, than you are because of my good works.

*Of course Jesus **is** Lord of all.* That includes being Lord of our sanctification - the sometimes slow daily process of making us more like Himself.

J.C. Ryle said, “*Let us not judge others rashly and hastily. Let us believe that a man's beginnings in religion may be very small, and yet his latter end may greatly increase. Has a man real grace? Has he within him the genuine work of the Spirit? This is the grand question.*”

The more I thought about it this week, the more heroic these guys became. Joseph and Nicodemus risked everything:

- It would be suspicious in the eyes of Rome, considering there was talk of Jesus being an insurrectionist bent on overthrowing Caesar. They'd be added to the terrorist watch list.
- The Jews might excommunicate them, seeing as they had decreed no one should have anything to do with Jesus.

There is no indication that Joseph or Nicodemus had any hope that Jesus was going to rise from the dead.

Joh 19:39 And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds.

Nicodemus, too, has been criticized because he "first came... by night" to talk to Jesus. It is assumed that he came under cover of darkness for fear of the Jews. If that's true, I have no problem with it. You can't expect Nicodemus to be a mature Christian from the jump, *before he was even a Christian*. We don't excuse sin, but we ought to be especially gracious about expectations.

A "hundred pounds" of "myrrh and aloes" was worth bank. This wasn't your basic DIY Messiah funeral hack. It was extravagant.

Believers struggle with giving, especially monetary giving. The amount you give isn't the critical issue. Giving materially to the Lord is a matter for the heart to determine and not some Old Covenant percentage.

Think about love at its best. Does love withhold? Is love stingy? Does love cut corners? No. Is love sacrificial? Yes.

Love is more like Mary, breaking an alabaster jar of costly fragrant oil and pouring it on Jesus' feet.

When you talk to the Lord about *giving*, He's talking to you about *loving*.

Was Jesus generous? Was He a giver? "Yes" & "Yes," and so will His disciples be generous givers.

Joh 19:40 Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury.

First century Hebrew culture was a rush-to-bury bunch. Shemuel Safrai, Professor emeritus of History of Jewish People at Hebrew U. says, "*The traditions about the customs of Jerusalem report that 'One should not keep the corpse through the night,' but rather bury it on the very day of death.'*"

Leaving a corpse unburied through the night was permitted only if more time was needed for the preparation of the body. If you were, for example, waiting on FedEx to deliver a shroud from Turin, Italy, perhaps you could put off burial for a short time.

Think about how funeral conscious these people would be. They had to drop whatever they were doing and throw together a funeral before nightfall.

Joh 19:41 Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid.

The Jews in first century Rome practiced what is called *second burial*. Archaeologist Ronny Reich says:

The process of Jewish burial in the Second Temple period took place in two stages:

1. First, the dead person was buried on a ledge of a rock-hewn tomb.
2. Then after about one year, when the body had decomposed, family members of the deceased returned to the tomb, gathered the bones and put them into a small box of stone or wood called an ossuary.

Have you made the preparations necessary for your funeral and interment? Jesus did. He made them as far back as eternity past, and they are recorded by Isaiah. "And they made His grave with the wicked and with a rich man in His death, although He had done no violence, and there was no deceit in His mouth" (53:9). It was another prophecy Jesus fulfilled after He died.

Joh 19:42 So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby.

This funeral was on a strict schedule. Jesus dismissed His spirit at 3pm. The Sabbath began at sundown, only a few hours later.

We're not told the ages of Joseph or Nicodemus. We think of them as old, but that is a bias. They were at least 40 in order to serve on the council. They could have been in their forties or fifties.

Their lives changed dramatically in a few hours. Their bold-score was off the charts. They cared nothing about action the council might take against them, or the reaction of Rome. They unashamedly identified with Jesus in His death and burial.

Are you somewhat of a secret disciple? It could change in a short time. Joseph and Nicodemus are role models. They went from secret to spiritual, from cowering to courageous. He is working tirelessly, 24/7, to grow you. Cooperate by believing that the indwelling Holy Spirit empowers and enables you to submit to the Lord of all.

One last look. Two men of stature, leaders and teachers, were pressed into serving as morticians. Jesus might tap you any time to do what needs doing in serving Him. Stay ready, and develop a greater sense of spiritual awareness.